

Winning the Battle Against False Teachers

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It's a delight as always to come to the teaching of the word of God here on Sunday morning and knowing the different places where some of you are at in your spiritual lives, I trust that what God has for us in his word today is going to be an encouragement to you in the midst of the difficult days in which we live. For those of you that are visiting, we are studying through the book of 1 John and I would invite you to turn there toward the back of your New Testament. 1 John is where we have been studying almost since the launch of the church. I think we started back in May, maybe April or May, something like that. But it's always an opportunity for me when I know we have a lot of visitors here to just briefly recapitulate what the central message of 1 John is and why this book was written in order to kind of help you get into the flow of the thought that those of us that are able to be here week by week have been enjoying through the work of the Spirit in our hearts. Very simply stated: the Apostle John wrote the letter of 1 John to his readers in order to help them achieve spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world. We have gone over this repeatedly. John wants his readers to know joy, chapter 1, verse 4; he wants them to experientially live out holiness in their lives, chapter 2, verse 1; and he wants them to have an assurance of salvation in the midst of the hostile environment in which they live, chapter 5, verse 13. He has multiple spiritual purposes that he is trying to accomplish as he writes and not only is he trying to accomplish them, we know for certain that they were accomplished and they are accomplished in the lives of God's people when they study this work, when they study this book, I should say, because God's word always accomplishes what he sends it out to do. So I am quite confident as we study this book and as we continue to study it in the days to come, that your experiential knowledge of joy, assurance and holiness are going to be increased by the impact of God's word on your life. That's one of the beautiful things about being a preacher, it takes all of the pressure off. When you believe in the sovereign work of God through the work of his word, you don't have to try to manipulate people to respond in a certain way, if you simply lay out the word of God to them, the hearts of the redeemed are going to respond and God will accomplish his purposes. So it's very invigorating for me to be able to bring this to you here this morning. John wants you to know, the Bible want you to know joy, holiness and assurance, and what John did back some 2,000 years ago was he used his apostolic authority, he used the commission that the Lord Jesus himself gave to him, and he used his authority writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to protect these readers and to have a spiritual influence on them that would be to their good and to the glory of Christ in their lives.

Now, why is such a letter necessary? Why do we need today this kind of instruction? Why can't we just go and generally live out a life of joy, holiness and assurance without much sense of conflict or battle in the process? Well, as you read through the book of 1 John, John makes it very clear, he's very candid and he sets forth in very clear and unequivocal language that Christians, meaning you and I, we live in the midst of a world that is totally arrayed against those spiritual goals that God is trying to accomplish in our lives. The world and its temptations, the world and its hatred of Christ, and even within our own flesh, we have our own tendencies and temptations toward sin. There is all manner of opposition to living out that kind of spiritual life. It doesn't just happen simply by waking up in the morning and going about your day. It doesn't just happen. We live in a world that hates Christ, that hates Christians, for that matter, is opposed to truth and tempts us to sin.

Now, in 1 John, what you have is you have a magnificent work of the Spirit of God showing you and giving you the power and the understanding necessary to live a godly life as you walk as aliens in the midst of this hostile world. I wish Christians would come to grips with the fact, I don't mean you in particular, I'm talking more generally, more broadly, I wish that Christians would embrace the fact that we are living as aliens in this world, that our citizenship is not on earth, it is in heaven, because it would totally change the level of frustration that they feel when opposition comes from the world or things don't work out in the world like they wish they would. We don't really care about that so much. That's secondary to us. It is rather immaterial to us because we are citizens of heaven, we're moving toward a heavenly home, and therefore the things that happen here have a secondary influence on the way that we think.

Well, one of the ways that we face this hostility, one of the things that Christians have to overcome as I kind of pivot into what we're going to be talking about here this morning, one particular threat to your spiritual well-being is this: the world is filled with false teachers who undermine the truth, who lead people away, who Jesus said if it were possible would deceive even the elect. These are strong, powerful, influential, deceitful men who have as their life ambition driven by the spiritual forces at work in their heart to draw people away from Christ, get this, to draw them away from the joy and assurance and holiness that is meant to be the mark of the Christian life. We live in the midst of an alien environment and one of the alien aspects of that is the presence of false teachers all around us.

Now, one particular threat, one of the particular aspects, one of the distinguishing marks that sometimes come through these false teachers is, get this, they are men who previously, some of them, previously affirmed the Christian faith and then later abandoned it. What are we to think about men like that? Well, this is what the readers of John were dealing with back in the first century. They had been influenced by men who appeared to be Christian teachers but their doctrine was false and eventually they left the church and said, "We don't need the church anymore. We're going to go out and we're going to teach and we have this secret knowledge that is reserved for those who really really know God." And put yourself in the sandals of the first century Christian, that

leaves them in a vulnerable position. "Have I missed something? Do these men know something that I don't? Is my salvation real? They're saying that it's not. What do I do?" And there is this conflict of confusion in the heart that is generated whenever men abandon the faith like that within the circle of those that were under their influence.

And we see this all the time even today in places that you would not originally suspect to find it. The most prominent academic society for theological evangelical study is called the Evangelical Theological Society and there are some good man in that society and there are some good things that come out of it, but a few years ago the president of the Evangelical Theological Society denied the faith and resigned his position so that he could embrace Roman Catholicism. This was supposedly the leading evangelical academic in the world and he resigned his position so that he could go back to Roman Catholicism. What are we to make of that? Another Bible teacher who wrote many prominent and, at the time, significant books on the history of the transmission of the Bible text is now a man who denies the resurrection and calls himself the Happy Agnostic and he has written books that deny the faith. He goes on to TV and attacks and undermines the authority of Scripture, giving half-truths in the process in order to undermine people. And you look at these men and here's the spiritual problem that men like that create for ordinary Christians that are sitting in the pew looking at their faith and trying to live the Christian life: you look at scholars like that, you look at men and men who have positions of teaching authority like that and you think, "What do they know that I don't know? They are scholars, they must know something that I don't." And you start to question the foundation of what you built your life on. The foundation of your hope is being attacked by men who formerly said they believe what you say and then they convey this error that, "Oh, I've grown out of that." And it's a damnable thing that they do when they do that.

On a personal level, all of us know men and women in our own individual lives who at one time said that they professed Christ but now they have no interest in spiritual things, they have no interest in the body of Christ; they live in open sin and rebellion and either say, "I'm not a Christian," or they say they still maintain the pretense of being a Christian but their life is a total denial of everything that it means to be in Christ, a total denial of joy, holiness and assurance. Here's the question for us this morning in this room: what are we to make of all of that? How are we to understand and respond to that when Christian leaders defect from the faith? When entire churches abandon the philosophy of ministry that established them for decades and go off into different directions, what are we to make of that? How are we to respond to that? how are we to think of those family members that say they knew Christ and then walked away?

Well, that's what we're going to be talking about over the next couple of weeks and these two verses from 1 John 2 beginning in verse 18. Let me read those. We're only going to look at verse 18 this morning, otherwise we'd be here and it would just be one continual service until communion at 6:30 and I don't want to do that to you. Chapter 2, verse 18 says,

18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

That's the verse we're really going to focus on this morning but I'll read verse 19 to set it up for next week,

19 They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

That's a very important passage in light of the issue that we are considering here today.

What do we make of these Christian men? Did these people somehow lose genuine salvation? Did these people somehow find truth that if only you and I knew it, we too would walk away? Those are the questions. Did they discover truth that the rest of us have somehow missed and we're walking in ignorance? Is that what we find ourselves, is our Christian position, is our position in the Lord Jesus Christ that vulnerable? Of course not. That is not true. Our confidence in Jesus Christ, our confidence in his word is not misplaced. We are grounded on a solid rock and it is essential to a mature Christian walk for you to understand the nature of spiritual defectors. This is very vital and it's what John was writing; it was one of the primary reasons that he wrote this letter is because the people that he loved and cared about were facing that very issue back in the first century. In theological terms, we are dealing with the problem of apostasy, the deliberate abandonment of the Christian faith. John's readers had seen it, we see it all around us, how are we to think about this? Stated differently: how are we to win the battle against false teachers, is really the question that's in front of us? We're not afraid to address this issue. We are not afraid of men who walk away. We are not tempted to think that somehow they know something that we don't and what we're going to see here in the Scripture are the biblical reasons that we can be strong and confident even though other men are walking away and are betraying the trust that was put into them; who have betrayed the trust of the position that God gave them for our time; who are betraying the trust of the men who look to them for spiritual teaching and leadership. Make no mistake, it is a betrayal of cosmic magnitude for which they will be held eternally accountable.

So how are we to think about this as individual believers? As just common ordinary Joe's and Mary's in the spiritual life who simply find it our desire to love Christ and love the Scriptures? Well, I want to tell you it's more than simply saying, "Well, I'm just going to have faith and not even think about it. You know, I'm just going to focus on my own walk with the Lord and not think about these things." No, there is a much more significant way to respond to them. The Bible lays all of this out for us. We really have no reason to be discouraged by this. The Scripture lays it all out for us and prepares us to respond to that on a profound philosophical level in a way that strengthens our confidence and gives our testimony to Christ even greater clarity and power as we walk through the life as others are being picked off one by one to fall away. We are not going

down that path. We will never go down that path as long as I'm the pastor here at Truth Community Church and as long as the Spirit of God is present among us.

So how do we understand this? I want to give you two points here this morning. First of all, I want to talk to you about the expectation of false teachers. That's not a very good...I just realized that's really not a very good way to say it but since it's in my notes, that's what I'm stuck with for this morning. The expectation of false teachers. Here's what I mean by that: it's not what false teachers expect, it's that we as Christians expect false teachers to be a problem in the church of Jesus Christ. We expect it to be a problem and so when it happens we're not caught offguard. We're not surprised as if this was some strange unexpected thing that's come into the world and where did this come from and what does this mean for truth? No, it doesn't mean anything like that at all.

We expect this if we read the Bible, we expect to see this problem occur and that's what John is driving us to in chapter 2, verse 18. He said, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming," verse 18, look at it with me, "even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour." When he says it's the last hour, what does he mean by that? What he's referring to is the fact that he's referring to this period, this age between the first time coming of Christ some 2,000 years ago and the second coming of Christ, an event that is still future to us today, that is an event of uncertain timing. You had the first coming of Christ, Christians believe that Christ is coming again, and in between you can think of it as a parenthesis between Christ's appearance on earth and his return in glory, there is this parenthesis that the Bible calls the last hour. It's not referring to 60 minutes, it's referring to a period of time during which is the interval between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ.

Now, one of the marks at the end of the age shortly before the return of Christ will be the rise of a world figure that the Bible calls the antichrist. Stay with me here, it's not that long or complicated. While the term "antichrist" in the Bible is only found in John's epistles, the concept is found in what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians. Turn back just a few pages in your Bible before the book of Hebrews to 2 Thessalonians. I want to see this, 2 Thessalonians 2:1. What does he mean when he's talking about the antichrist and many antichrists have arisen? That's what we want to look at here this morning. What's going on here? Look at what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, Paul says, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him," this future return of Christ is what's at stake in what Paul is saying here. He says, we request you, verse 2, "that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." So see, when people start to teach falsely, true Christians can have their composure shaken. They can be shaken away from their peace and their confidence. It has an undermining effect on the church and so Paul is writing to reestablish their composure in the midst of false teaching that they had received.

Verse 3, he says, "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who

opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." Stop right there. Paul is writing and saying, "Listen, here is what you need to understand about the end times, before the day of the Lord comes, there is going to be a world figure, the son of lawlessness, who establishes himself and powerfully presents himself opposing God." That's all the further and all the deeper that we need to go into it right now. Paul says, "This is going to be a characteristic of the end of the age."

Now, with that in mind, go back to 1 John 2. There is this coming central figure that is going to be in opposition to Christ that is going to be one of the telling marks of the end of the age. Now, look at chapter 2, verse 18 of 1 John, that teaching that Paul gave to the Thessalonians which was one of the earliest New Testament books that was ever written, that teaching was familiar to John's readers as well. Chapter 2, verse 18, look at it again, he says, "Children, it is the last hour; and," note this, "just as you heard that antichrist is coming," okay, this was common teaching in the church, this was something that the men and women of the church of Jesus Christ knew about, were aware of, that there was going to be this future manifestation of a powerful world leader who would rise up in opposition to God and Christ. John's readers had heard about that. It was familiar teaching to them as shown by those words, "you've heard that antichrist is coming." This age, this time in which you and I now live, is moving toward the rise of a final antichrist who will oppose the true Christ.

Now, what does that mean for the presence of false teachers in our midst? In 1 John, John was writing to counteract these false teachers that we've talked about. They said that Jesus was not truly God incarnate in human flesh. Look at chapter 4, stay with me here. In chapter 4, verse 2 of 1 John, we kind of have to lay out the facts and then synthesize them and bring them all together here, that's what we're in the process of doing right now. Chapter 4, verse 2, John giving his readers discernment says, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus," in that way, in other words referring back to verse 2, everyone who doesn't confess Jesus like I just said, "is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world." What's he saying here? Why is that important? It's important to understand that false teaching about Christ is not simply a matter of a theological difference of opinion. It's not simply a matter of, "This is how I view it. This is how you view it," and we can go along and pretend that this doesn't matter. No, there are matters of great eternal consequence in this. When a teacher teaches a false Christ, teaches that he is something other than eternal God in human flesh come to save men from their sins by his vicarious substitutionary death on the cross, when you say that Christ is anyone other than that, you're a false teacher and you are opposing the true Christ. You are antichrist. You are opposing Christ with your false teaching and that's no matter of small consequence because if you teach your audience a false Christ, you are teaching them a false salvation. You are securing them in deception that will lead to the eternal damnation of their souls.

There are matters of great eternal consequence in what we believe about Christ. It's not simply a matter of a difference of opinion and so teachers who deny the true Christ are manifesting the spirit of opposition to Christ in their teaching and thereby opposing him just as much, although in a different way, than that final world antichrist will do at the end of the age. It's the same spirit of opposition and hatred toward the true Christ that is animating the ruler at the end of the age as well as the false teachers in our day and that's why we have to be, beloved, we have to be so clear and precise in our teaching because we are living in a spirit of time where these matters of doctrinal importance and precision are at a discount. People don't want to talk this way. They just want to get along with everyone and the Bible says you can't have it that way. The Spirit of Christ cannot coexist amiably with the spirit of antichrist. It really shouldn't be that difficult to understand, should it? And here's the thing: when you encounter those kinds of false teaching, when the church encounters false teachers like that, it calls for a strong response. We can't be passive in the face of that. We can't stay silent. We cannot stay silent in the face of someone rising themselves up against the one that we call Lord and Savior and Master and God. Our allegiance to Christ, our love for truth, our love for the souls of men compel us to say, "No, that's not right. I can't stand by and just let that happen." Paul said the love of Christ compels us. We're compelled to speak. We're compelled to know these things and be true to the truth.

Well, coming back to the circumstances of chapter 2 here in 1 John, the Apostle John is writing to these beleaguered believers, uncertain, unsure, not sure where they stand in light of the fact that some of their teachers had left, and he realizes that their departure had the potential to create doubt and confusion. The Christians were left with this question: should I leave too? Have I been wrong all this time? Did I get it wrong? So they are teetering on the brink, not sure which side of the line they should fall on and so John with great apostolic authority and the tender heart of a loving pastor steps into the breach and says, "Don't you go anywhere. Let me remind you about the truth. Let me remind you about the implications of all that you've heard of biblical teaching so that you won't go astray."

And what he does in verse 18, he says, "Look, little children," he spoke to them that way. You can see that and you can go throughout the letter and it's just an interesting study to just take 10 minutes to see how many times the Apostle John refers to his readers as "little children, children, beloved, brethren." He absolutely loved these people and he was about to depart from the earthly scene, he was in his 90s. This is his apostolic swan song and he's drawing upon every apostolic fiber that he has in order to protect them and to keep them where they were at and what he's saying to them is, he says, "Beloved, your doubts are unnecessary. Yes, you have seen prominent men depart and attack the faith that they once said that they believed but don't let that shake you. This isn't surprising. This was to be expected all along. You've heard all along. You've heard from the beginning that antichrist was coming. Well, understand that one of the things that marks this parenthesis of time since Christ ascended to heaven until he comes back from heaven, one of the things that marks this period of time is that the spirit of antichrist is going to be at work. It's going to manifest itself through false teachers who try to undermine the truth. Expect it and when it happens, don't be surprised. Don't be shaken

from your composure. Don't feel like you have to rethink everything that you learned to be true. This was to be expected. These men, we knew they were going to come. Now they're here, what's the trouble? There is no surprise here at all. Everything that the Bible said about the appearance of a final antichrist, we can see it being fulfilled in the spirit of false teachers all around us." Look at it this way: that final opposition to Christ still to come, that climactic opposition, was already at work in the false teachers. That's all. This was what was going to happen and the Bible tells us to expect this problem coming up from within the church.

Defection is not surprising and I have to show you this. We've got to take some time to look at some passages. Turn back to the Gospel of Matthew 7 and we're just going to read some passages here. Matthew 7:15, Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." From outward experience, outward appearance, I should say, they look harmless. They look like one of you. He said, "Be aware of men like that because although they look harmless, they're actually inwardly ravenous wolves. They are false teachers. Be on guard for such ones and don't be surprised when they appear. Be ready. Be forearmed. Understand that it's going to come and respond thusly." And he goes on and he says how you can identify them, "You will know them by their fruits," he says. We'll look at that passage at some point in the future in greater detail. All I want you to see right now is that the Bible tells you to utterly expect this kind of defection happening.

Look at chapter 24 of Matthew, verse 24. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus says, "false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." There are going to be a proliferation of false teachers. He says, "They're going to be really compelling in what they say and do." He says, "Be on guard. Be on the alert. Be aware for this because they are going to be so persuasive that they'll be tempted even to deceive those who are true Christians." That's how severe it is.

So we shouldn't expect this to be something that is just a casual encounter in the park. This is sometimes going to be hand-to-hand combat with difficult foes to oppose; powerful men very deceptive and in the age in which you and I are living, trying to deal with this with people who don't even have an appetite for discernment, people who don't even want to talk about these issues or even think this way. Well, that means it's going to be really difficult. Okay, do you know what? It's going to be difficult. Do you know what my response to that is? Bring it on. God has raised us up for such a time as this. God has appointed us for this very hour in the sphere of influence and the sphere of opportunity that he has given to us, he has given us this opportunity to stand for him in this hour. He didn't give us the battles of the 1800s. He didn't give us the battles of the fourth century. He gave us the battle of the early 21st century. He appointed us for this time and we are going to rise and stand for him and be faithful to him in the midst of the opportunity he has given us whether anyone listens or not. We're just going to be true to Christ and let God do with that what he wants but one thing that we will not do is we will not bow to false teachers, we will not be intimidated by their arrogance, we will just stand and proclaim the word of God faithfully. We will call out false teaching when it appears and we'll trust God to do with that what he wants. It's pretty simple, isn't it? It's all about us

just being faithful to Christ in the sphere that he has given to us, and what he has given to us is this sphere in this time and age against these false teachers right now. Okay, God has brought us to this point. Let's embrace it. Let's not be afraid. Now, so the Bible tells us to expect this. We don't have to run and hide and cover our head because there are incoming missiles of false teaching. No, this is where the battle is. This is glorious. Let's run and the battle. Let's engage the fight that God has given to us to engage. That's what soldiers do and one of the pictures that the Bible gives of Christians is that of a soldier called to battle.

Now, Acts 20. Again, I'm just showing you these passages to help you see that this was entirely to be expected, this problem of false teachers. And we don't have to be afraid, beloved, and we don't have to play the victim, beloved, we don't have to cower in shame. We just embrace this. This is what our Lord told us to expect and so we gladly embrace it for the sake of the one who shed his blood as payment for our sins against him in order that we could be redeemed. We're glad to embrace this. We're glad for the shame and reproach that it brings to us because we know that Christ suffered shame and reproach on our behalf in order to secure our salvation. During this little window of time he gives us of life right now, to endure shame and reproach for him is of no consequence. We are glad to bear the reproach that Christ first bore for us.

Now, in Acts 20:29, the Apostle Paul is about to depart the elders at Ephesus and look at what he says. He says, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." Paul expected this exact same problem to occur after he left the men at Ephesus, after he left that church. He says, "Look, I know what's going to happen. There are going to be savage wolves that rise up from among your own midst and try to devastate the flock, try to pull them away." So Paul is just preparing them. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. What would you think about a sergeant that was preparing his troops for battle and didn't prepare them for a fight? Whose preparation for them said it's all going to be ease, the enemy will lay down their guns and we'll just go in and we'll just walk through and it will be an easy day for us? A sergeant like that would be discharged from his commission. He would be discharged from the army. That's not the way that you prepare troops for battle. You tell them what is coming so that they know what to expect and they can rise to the battle that is going to engage them.

Well, that's just exactly what the Bible does for us as believers in Christ, it says this battle with deception and arrogant prominent men is going to come. Be ready for it. And the blessed glorious thing about it is that the Lord Jesus Christ said in Matthew 28, he said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The Lord Jesus promises his presence with his people as they engage this battle, as they go and disciple nations; as they call men to Christ; call them out of this wicked perverse world; as they engage the battle for truth. Christ says, "I myself will be with you in your midst to bless your labors and to defend you and keep you in the midst of it." Why would we want to run from a battle where Christ is at? Wherever that's at, wherever Christ is at, that's where I want to be, don't you? Don't you want to be right where Christ is at? And if the battle line is

drawn with false teachers attacking him, don't we want to be right where he's at? Right where Christ is at and be instruments of the defense of his great and glorious name? Of course that's where we want to be. We love Christ because he first loved us. This is simply a return of loyalty to an unspeakably great gift of salvation that he bought for us with the price of his own blood. I don't even think this is complicated. I don't think this is difficult.

Look at 2 Corinthians. The Bible says the love of Christ compels us. 2 Corinthians 11. Paul was dealing with false teachers, now at the church of Corinth, this adds a little added dimension to it for us. 2 Corinthians 11:13, "such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." Do you see how deceptive it is? Verse 14, "No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore," verse 15, "it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

One more, 2 Peter. You can find that right after 1 Peter. 2 Peter, following 1 Peter. That's where I want to turn in chapter 2, verse 1. "False prophets also arose among the people," get this, "just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly," notice that word, "secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves."

So let's tie all of this together. Let's just kind of synthesize it all. We expect false teachers to be a problem as we live for Christ in the midst of this age. We expect that. We're not surprised when it happens and so when men come up who formerly proclaimed the truth and then walked away from it either by moral default or by switching their teaching, we say, "Okay, I expected you to come. I'm ready for you. I'm not afraid. I am not intimidated by your arrogance because the Bible told me long before you were ever born, the Bible told me to expect just men like you and so we're not surprised by it." At the same time, we're aware that there is a level of deception that is involved in this and there is a level of secrecy that's involved in this that makes it so that it's not an easy fight to engage. It's a battle that the church of Christ will win but that doesn't mean that it's going to be easy. Jesus said they come looking like sheep. Paul said they disguise themselves as angels of light. They secretly introduce destructive heresies. So we realize that while there is a battle that we are happy to engage, we don't expect this battle to be easy. We expect it to require some careful thinking and effort and commitment on our part in order to be faithful to Christ in the midst of it. We expect that.

Well, how does all of that help you? Let's go back to the big theme of 1 John. The big theme of 1 John is he's writing to help us achieve spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world. How does all of this help us? Why doesn't it just frighten us and make us want to scurry away? How does it help us? It helps us a lot and that brings us to our second point which is: the response to false teachers. We had the expectation of false teachers, how do we respond to them? What do we think about this in response? And those of you maybe that have come out of false systems of religion and are into Christ, this I hope will help strengthen you even more in that noble cause that you undertook when you repented and put your faith in Christ and embarked on following him in spirit and in truth, leaving,

abandoning the way they you were raised maybe. There is a great nobility to that and I respect Christians that have done that.

How does this help us respond to false teachers? The expectation, now the response. First of all, well, I don't want to say first of all because this is just kind of introductory. Understand that when you see prominent men betray the truth, when you see people that you thought were Christians walk away and deny Christ, understand that you do not need to question your faith when someone abandons what they formerly professed. There is a sense in which that does not affect you at all in the sense that it does not shake the foundation of your confidence in Christ. I realize there is a relational impact if this happens in your family and you see that. Of course it affects you on that emotional human plane but when it comes to what do I believe, where is my confidence in Christ, it doesn't shake that at all because your faith was never meant to reside in men in the first place. Our faith is built on nothing less than the word of God and Jesus' blood and righteousness and what men do does not affect the foundation at all. You must have that straight in your mind if you're going to survive in the midst of a spiritual battle like this. Know why you believe. You believe because of the Bible. You believe because of Christ. You believe because of the work of the Spirit of God in your heart and that is independent of what anyone else does with it. So you don't have to be plagued with doubt when someone tries to destroy the faith they once proclaimed. You can just say with the Apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded, I am convinced that he is able to keep that which I have entrusted to him until the final day."

But there's more to it than that. It's not just a total faith response like that. You could adopt that as just a blind faith sticking your fingers in your ears and saying, "I'm not going to deal with the situation at all." That's not what we're talking about. So I want to give you four things here in responding to false teachers to just kind of help you. First of all, how do you respond to false teachers? 1. Understand the times. Understand the times in which you live. Go back to chapter 2, verse 18. This is exactly what John was telling his readers to do and it's right there, it's obvious in the text. I'm not pulling out something hidden from remote language studies that you can't see for yourself.

Look at chapter 2, verse 18, John says, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared," you know, there is this spirit of antichrist, this opposition to Christ, lots of false teachers opposing him. Now look what he says about that, "from this," from the presence of these false teachers opposing Christ, "from this we know that it is the last hour." Their presence tells you that what the Bible has said all along has been true. This just tells us, the fact that there's opposition to Christ tells us that we are still in that period before Christ returns and establishes his reign on earth. So we say, "Of course this is just going to mark the time before Christ returns and while I wish, while I pray that Christ would return today, I would love to see him exalted on the earth and reigning over all of the earth as the Scripture says in Habakkuk 2:14, his glory is going to fill all the earth and I just really want to see that day like right now." God in his wisdom has said, "Not yet." "And so I look about," you say to yourself, "I look about and I say, okay, this is the last hour. This is the time where God is still allowing opposition to Christ to manifest itself. I understand

the times in which I live and sometimes it's going to be guys I never would have dreamt would turn into public opponents of Christ. Wow. Okay but that's the times. I understand in what we live and I understand in the midst of that," you say to yourself, "I can still be at peace with this because God is working out his plan without fail. None of this is lost on God. God hasn't lost. These foolish arrogant men whose breath is in their nostrils have not somehow managed to knock God off his throne." So you just keep a high view of God at the center and understand the times in which you live and when these men come out in the open and manifest what they were truly like all along, you don't panic. You don't collapse in fear. You don't quake as though this was something unexpected. You're not shaken from your firm confidence in Christ. God is on his throne. The Bible said to expect it and so when it appears you say, "Oh, this was to be expected." And you go on living faithfully for Christ because you understand the times in which you live. That's part of the way that you respond.

Secondly, another aspect of the response to false teachers here is to, secondly, undertake discernment. Undertake discernment. Look at chapter 4, verse 1, and realize that discernment is not an optional activity for Christians, it is a commanded act of obedience to our Lord. Chapter 4, verse 1, of 1 John, you know, he's dealing with these false teachers and here's what he says to his readers. He says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." He says, "There are a lot of false prophets out there. Don't be gullible." I really want to preach a message on this topic and just title it, "Don't be a sucker." You know, don't be someone like at a carnival and you just throw your money after things that are just bound to rob you of your riches. Don't be gullible for every teacher who comes along acting like they just discovered something for the first time that undermines what Christians have always believed for 2,000 years. Don't be gullible for that kind of deceit. The Scriptures say test the spirits. Evaluate what they say in light of the Bible. And what you should walk out of here loving and being confident about is that you, even as a lay person, you have in the Scriptures everything that you need in order to be able to discern truth from error. That's the point of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, that the man of God might be adequate, equipped for every good work. And when you're challenged by teaching or something like that, just take your time to go back to the Bible and not be thrown off of the hope that has sustained you.

And here's a real practical thing for those of you maybe that are new in the faith or you haven't had much opportunity to read and all of that, as a practical matter, thinking back to this president of ETS who walked away to go back to Catholicism, thinking of this despicable man who upheld the Bible for so long and now denies the resurrection and one of the things that these guys love to do is they know that that gets them a gig. It gets them to sell books. It gets them on TV. It gets them all kinds of attention and don't think that that doesn't motivate them, and don't think that there aren't sinful things in their lives that they are trying to cover up with that as well. If they can define God out of existence, then it justifies their own sinful lives. Don't underestimate the power of that and the reality of those kinds of forces. But you're still left with what about these issues that they are raising? Well, here's something really practical. As a practical matter, if those defectors raise questions that you've never thought about, don't panic. Don't let that throw you off

either. Godly pastors and Christian thinkers for centuries have been dealing with those very hard questions and answering them century after century after century and the fact that maybe you're not familiar with those answers doesn't mean that those answers don't exist. The church of Christ, the faithful men of God through the centuries, have been facing those things head on for centuries. It is a conceit of the modern mind to think that a 21st century rebel against Christ could raise up questions that would undermine and overthrow the Scriptures and the thinking of men like Augustine and Luther and Calvin and Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon and J. C. Ryle and J. Gresham Machen and Martyn Lloyd Jones and Ian Murray and John MacArthur and other men like them. It is a deceit of the modern mind of incalculable proportions to think that a single false teacher somehow could overthrow those centuries of inherited faithful truth teaching by those great men. And let the weight and one of the things that we need to do, there is so much that we need to do in the life of this church but one of the things that we need to do some time before too long is to have just a little bit of an overview of church history to give you an appreciation for the fact that we have received from men who have gone before us an incalculable deposit of truth that has been given to us and we simply stand on their shoulders and want to transmit it to the next generation.

But the main point in this thing here responding to false teachers, understand the times, undertake discernment, understand this: that even if you are confronted with a question that you've never thought of, don't think for a moment that that means that no one has ever addressed it. These false teachers who go on television and give little soundbites, they prey on, p-r-e-y, they thrive on people being uninformed and giving them narrow bits of information and they never give you the full context that would show how false what they're saying obviously is. So don't be intimidated by that. Just go back and say, "Okay, I need to get some help here." Turn to trusted men from the past and from the present so that they can teach you to trust in Christ. You don't have to be afraid. They are not going to tell you anything that hasn't been addressed multiple times throughout the course of church history. They're not and there will never be a discovery of archaeology or science or anything that overturns the simple clear teaching of Scripture on everything that matters.

Now, thirdly, undergird your heart. Undergird your heart. So you understand the times, how do we respond, how do we win the battle against false teachers? You understand the times, you undertake discernment, thirdly, you undergird your heart, and this is where it becomes very, what's the word, this is where you have to apply it, you might say, in terms of your own life. When you see men fall away from Christ, when you see people in your lives that deny Christ where they formerly professed him, when you see that, take heed to yourself. Your first act of obedience is to examine your own heart and to come and to renew your own commitment to the grace and knowledge of Christ. Rather than speculate about what happened with them, you come back and you check yourself.

Go to 2 Peter again, 2 Peter 3, and we're almost done here. 2 Peter 3:14. Even if you're not engaged on the front lines of the battle like Ken Ham is, you still have responsibility when these battles are raging around you. You have responsibility in your own walk with Christ and you need to take it seriously.

2 Peter 3:14, "Therefore, beloved," I love how the Scripture addresses true Christians as beloved, don't you? It's an indication of the heart of God toward his people. We're beloved to him and he writes these things not to condemn us but to strengthen us. "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things," looking to the future manifestation, the return of Christ, all those things, "since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you." Now watch what happens here in verse 16 in light of everything that we've said, "as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand." There are some scriptural doctrines that are difficult to understand so don't be surprised by that. But watch how this becomes an opportunity for false teachers, "these things which are hard to understand which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." What do we do in light of these men who distort the Scriptures? What do you do as an individual believer just trying to lead your family and to be faithful to your children in Christ? What do you do as this is raging all around you? Verse 17, "You therefore, beloved," there it is again, "knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." What do you do? Your first responsibility is to realize that this happens, these false teachers come about, but then you simply renew your own commitment to day by day being a man or woman of the word of God, repenting of sin as it comes into your life, being faithful to the Scriptures, reading the Scriptures, seeking God in prayer and obedience, and that simple act of faithfulness, that faithful life is what God uses and works through in order to preserve you and keep you in the truth. You just undergird your own heart. You firm up your own heart and say, "Whatever else these other men do, whatever else my son or father or wife did in abandoning the faith, whatever else they do, the Lord Jesus Christ is going to find me right here in the word being faithful to him, trusting him and honoring him with my life. With the one life that he has given me, with the one tongue he has given me, he's going to find me right here and I'm going to grow and I'm not going to be distracted or follow after those who turn away to their own destruction." You just have that clear in your mind. This is the central commitment of your heart.

Finally, number 4. I had to stop at four because the words that start with "under," I was running out of them. There were other things that I wanted to say but it was going to mess up the outline. Understand the times, undertake discernment, undergird your heart, fourthly, underline the hope of heaven. Underline, by which I mean emphasize in your own mind, the hope of heaven and we'll close with this. 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." Listen, this is a glorious note to end on and this is where you need to come back to again and again and again in your own heart affections. To be a Christian ultimately means that one day you are going to see the Lord Jesus Christ in glory face to face. That is going to transcend anything that ever happened in this life. That is going to make anything that happens in

the next, say, 60 days with elections and things like that, it's going to drown them into utter insignificance because being with Christ is going to be so magnificent and so glorious the sight of him will transform you and somehow make you just like he is and that is the outcome of your Christian life. That is where your life is headed if you are in Christ and so let that hope shape your affections. Let it shape what you love. Let it shape what you are faithful to and know for certain, grounded in the word of God, that without fail the Lord Jesus Christ will fulfill the purpose in your life which he had for you from before the beginning of time to bring you one day fully into his glory and his glory we'll share together as we look at his glorious magnificent face, and there won't be any question in your mind then about false teachers, they're not even going to come to mind. God will usher off into destruction so don't let them pull your affections away as they are plunging into destruction. Keep your heart set on heaven and let that be that which undergirds your motivation and commitment to walk with Christ, to be discerning, and to engage the battle wherever it comes in your sphere of influence.

That is how we win the battle against false teachers and we're glad that the Lord has called us for such a time just as this. I wouldn't want to be anyplace else in any time of history. Do you know why? And you should be able to say that also, no other time of history would you want to be alive and be a Christian. Do you know why you can say that with absolute certainty? It's because this is the time that the Lord has given to you. The Lord has given to us this time right now for us to live and be faithful to Christ. If that's what he has given us, then it's got to be good. It's got to be for his glory and for our good and so we embrace it with joy and confidence and peace because we trust our Master to do what's best.

Bow with me in prayer as the musicians come.

Our Father, we thank you for the love that you have for your people. We thank you that you have prepared us for such a time as this. We thank you that you have prepared us for such a time as this. And in your word and in Christ and in your Spirit and in the hope of heaven, you have given us all we need for life and godliness. We thank you, our Lord, for what you have done. Help us to be strong. Help us to be true. Help us to be discerning. Help us to be faithful. And Lord, help us not to be shaken when men walk away. And Father, when it is loved ones that we know that have walked away and strayed from the truth, give us grace to call them back, call them back to what they say they once believed, call them back to faith and obedience to you. Give us the grace to call them back and not try to manipulate the earthly circumstances surrounding that but to simply uphold Christ and uphold your word to them and we'll trust your Spirit to accomplish what you desire in every circumstance. So we thank you for this time and we pray that you would give us grace as we serve you now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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